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AUTHOR Burger, Isabel B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents arguments for using creative dramatic activities with adolescents and senior citizens. In the case of teenagers, problems caused by rapid transition into adult life can be confronted through dramatic material which explores these issues. Exercises need not moralize, but they can subtly present new means of dealing with conflict. With older adults, similar activities can improve self-image and can foster creative growth. Examples of dramatic experiences with these two groups, which serve these ends, are provided. (KS)

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CREATIVE DRAMA IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

PREPARED FOR A PANEL DISCUSSION
ATA CONVENTION - LOS ANGELES AUGUST 1976

ISABEL B. BURGER

BEFORE WE CAN EVALUATE OR RECOMMEND ANY EXPERIENCES FOR TEENAGERS, WE MUST TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE FOURTEENS TO EIGHTEENS OF 1976, AND ANALYZE THEIR PROBLEMS AND THEIR NEEDS. LISTEN FOR A MOMENT TO THESE THEORIES FROM THE PERSONAL DIARIES OF FOUR OF THOSE YOUNG POEPLE:

"THE WHOLE DEAL GETS ME DOWN. WHEN I'M LIKE THIS I CAN'T TALK TO ANYBODY. I WISH I HAD OTHER GUYS' CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES! I NEVER FEEL AS IF I'M MEASURING UP..."

. . . . . .

".....I NEVER FEEL LIKE DOING ANYTHING. I'M NOT GETTING MY HOMEWORK DONE. I HAVEN'T SHOVELLED THE SNOW OFF THE WALK YET. DAD'LL RAISE HELL, BUT...SO WHAT? HE'S ALREADY DECIDED I'M NO GOOD ANYHOW."

. . . . . .

"...DAD'S A GREAT GUY AND HE SAYS HE LOVES ME...SURE. BUT I SURE AS HELL WISH HE'D GET OFF MY BACK ONCE IN A WHILE. WHY SHOULD I LET HIM LIVE MY LIFE, TOO?"

. . . . . .

"SOMETIMES I LIKE THE IDEA OF GROWING UP...AND THEN AGAIN, I'M NOT SO SURE. THINGS ARE GETTING TOUGHER...AND EVERYBODY'S ALWAYS YELLING ABOUT GRADES, TEACHERS, PARENTS, EVEN A LOT OF THE KIDS...."

. . . . . .

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"THIS IS WHY I FIGHT WITH MOM. SHE WANTS ME TO BE A LADY, AND SHE HAS IDEAS ABOUT WHAT KIND OF A PERSON A LADY IS. SHE'S SO OLD FASHIONED...IT'S A PAIN! MY WORLD'S DIFFERENT THAN HERS, I CAN'T BE HER KIND OF A LADY; I'D RATHER BE ME THAN A LADY ANYHOW. BUT WHY CAN'T I BE BOTH...THAT IS BE A LADY AND BE ME?" 1*

AT A GLANCE ONE CAN HEAR SEVERAL FAMILIAR STRAINS OR THEMES RUNNING THROUGH ALL OF THESE COMMENTS. THEY ECHO FEELINGS WHICH, I SUPPOSE, ARE COMMON TO HUNDREDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WE KNOW AND TEACH AND LOVE. THEY ARE ALL:

1) FEELING SOMETIMES CONFUSED AND DEPRESSED; 2) FEELING INSECURE, UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THEMSELVES AND LETHARGIC; 3) RESENTFUL AT BEING PUSHED TO ACT OR CONFORM BY PARENTS, TEACHERS OR OTHER ADULTS IN THEIR LIVES; 4) ANXIOUS TO FIND THEMSELVES AND BE THEMSELVES.

LIFE IS NOT SIMPLE AT THIS AGE; NOR ARE THERE EASY SOLUTIONS TO ITS PROBLEMS. ADOLESCENCE IS MARKED BY ABRUPT CHANGE, IN WHICH DEEP CONFLICTS EXIST BETWEEN OLD DRIVES OF LONG STANDING AND NEW NEEDS IMPLICIT IN THIS STAGE OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT. THE TEENAGER WANTS TO "BELONG" ABOVE ALL ELSE; HIS STATUS AND REPUTATION WITH HIS AGE-MATES IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. AND YET HE IS BESET WITH A HUNDRED DOUBTS, MISGIVINGS, CONTRADICTIONS, AND GUILT FEELINGS, WHEN HE TRIES TO COME TO TERMS WITH THIS NEW SELF THAT IS EMERGING.

EVERY YEAR SINCE INFANCY, HE HAS ACQUIRED ATTITUDES ABOUT HIMSELF AND OTHERS WHICH HAVE BECOME AN INTRINSIC PART OF HIS LIFE PATTERN. HE

1* REUEL HOWE YOUTH CONSIDERS PERSONAL MOODS, CAMDEN N.J. THOMAS NELSON AND SONS 1966

DESPERATELY NEEDS OUR HELP TO SORT OUT THE ADDITIONAL COMPLEXITIES WHICH DESCEND LIKE A HOLOCAUST IN HIS TEENS. AND YET WE HAVE A WAY OF IGNORING, IN FORMAL EDUCATION, THE STUDY OF THE INNER LIFE OF MAN AND HIS MOTIVES. WE TEND TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO EVADE, RATHER THAN FACE UP TO THEIR PERSONEL CONCERNS, EVEN THOUGH WE KNOW THAT ALMOST ALL ADOLESCENTS HARBOR GRIEVANCES, FEARS, INSECURITY, AND DOUBTS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. A. T. JERSILD POINTS TO OUR SHORTCOMINGS AS TEACHERS WHEN HE SAYS ON THIS SUBJECT: "BARRIERS AGAINST SELF-SCRUTINY ARE SO HIGH THAT IT WOULD REQUIRE AN EXCEPTIONALLY BOLD YOUNGSTER TO BRING UP THE PERSONAL MEANING OF HOSTILITY, EVEN THOUGH THE CLASS IS STUDYING EVIDENCES OF HUMAN HOSTILITY AS REVEALED BY THE CRUELTY, WARFARE, AND BLOODSHED RECORDED IN HISTORY BOOKS....THE EDUCATION PROGRAM DOES NOT SUBSCRIBE TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN."

TO UNDERSTAND ONESELF AND ACCEPT ONE'S SELF, MEANS TO RECOGNIZE AND REALIZE CERTAIN FACTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE...TO COME TO TRULY "KNOW THYSELF" AS SOCRATES ADVISED MANY CENTURIES AGO. ONLY WHEN A YOUNG PERSON IS WORKING FOR SELF-ACCEPTANCE CAN HIS DEVELOPMENT PROCEED IN A HEALTHY MANNER. THESE ARE THE SIGNS OF GROWTH: 1) HE IS ABLE TO LIVE COMFORTABLY WITH HIS OWN EMOTIONS, 2) HE IS WILLING TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIMSELF, 3) HE REGARDS HIMSELF AS ONE WHO IS WORTHY, THOUGH NOT PERFECT, 4) HE HAS A HEALTH/REGARD FOR HIS OWN RIGHTS, 5) HE ACCEPTS THE LIMITATIONS OF HIS NATURE WITHOUT FEELING ABUSED OR BLAMING OTHERS, 6) HE USES HIS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS TO BUILD GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, 7) HE USES HIS ABILITIES WITHOUT UNDER-RATING THEM OR STRIVING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE. AND THE TERM SELF-ACCEPTANCE IS

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH SMUGNESS OR SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. TO ACCEPT HIMSELF, THE GROWING PERSON MUST BE TOTALLY AWARE OF HIMSELF, HE CANNOT ACCEPT HIS LIMITATIONS UNLESS HE RECOGNIZES THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE. BUT WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT A CHILD'S ABILITY TO BECOME TOTALLY AWARE OF HIMSELF, WILL BE INFLUENCED BY THE WAY HE FEELS ABOUT HIMSELF AND THE WAY OTHERS FEEL ABOUT HIM. HE MUST BE ENCOURAGED TOWARD THIS SELF-DISCOVERY. KIERKEGAARD SAID MANY YEARS AGO:"...EVEN THE POOREST PERSONALITY IS EVERYTHING WHEN HE HAS CHOSEN HIMSELF; FOR THE GREAT THING IS NOT TO BE THIS OR THAT BUT TO BE ONE'S SELF."

AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN DEVELOPING THIS SELF-ACCEPTING ATTITUDE IS THE ABILITY TO ACCEPT AND BENEFIT FROM CRITICISM AND THEN TO USE THIS KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE AN HONEST APPRAISAL OF ONE'S SELF. WE, AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL, MUST FIND WAYS OF HELPING EVERY YOUNGSTER TO BECOME AWARE OF HIS STRENGTHS AND HIS LIMITATIONS..BUT WE MUST DO THIS WITHOUT LETTING HIM FEEL REJECTED, BUT RATHER SUPPORTED AND LOVED. HE WILL THEN LEARN TO EVALUATE CRITICISM, AND ACT ON IT RATHER THAN FEELING GUILTY OR DISMAYED. IT HAS BEEN PROVEN THAT THE GREATER THE CHILD'S SELF CONFIDENCE BECOMES, THE BETTER HE CAN AFFORD TO FACE THE FACT THAT HE IS AN IMPERFECT HUMAN BEING.

OUR VERY FIRST JOB AS TEACHERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IS, IN MY OPINION DISCOVERING WAYS TO HELP THEM FEEL COMFORTABLE AND SECURE AS THEY GO FORWARD. WHILE THEY NEED TIME TO GROW IN POWER TO BELIEVE INDEPENDENTLY IN THEMSELVES, THEY ALSO NEED THE UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF OTHERS.

THEY FACE A VERY REAL HOST OF DIFFICULTIES. THERE ARE VOCATIONAL PROBLEMS, DISCOVERING A NEW SET OF VALUES AND STANDARDS, VITALLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE THEY HAVE FORMERLY UPHELD, FINDING ACCEPTABLE OUTLETS FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF SPONTANEOUS ENERGY, SOLVING ALL SORTS OF ADULT CONFLICTS. AN ADOLESCENT'S DECISIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY A WIDE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE; HE IS NO LONGER THE CHILD WHO DECIDED SIMPLY WHETHER AN ACT WAS RIGHT OR WRONG ACCORDING TO HIS PARENTS CODE. HE MAY FIND TRADITIONAL METHODS LACKING IN EMOTIONAL DEPTH AND INSPIRATION, UNSATISFACTORY IN TERMS OF THE IDEALISTIC HEIGHTS TO WHICH HE ASPIRES. HIS CHOICES ARE DIFFICULT; THERE ARE SERIOUS CONFLICTS WHICH HAVE TO BE RESOLVED. ON THE ONE HAND LIES THE ~~NEED~~ READ TO SOME SPRITUAL DISCONTENT AS HE STRIVES FOR THE EMERGING VALUES HE RECOGNIZES IN A SWIFTLY CHANGING SOCIETY. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE GIVES IN AND IDENTIFIES WITH THE VALUES OF HIS PEERS, HE MAY WELL COME TO THE POINT OF LOSING THAT SPONTANEITY SO NECESSARY FOR HIS FULFILLMENT AS A HUMAN BEING.

I SAY ALL OF THIS BECAUSE WE, AS TEACHERS, DO HAVE TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT TEENAGERS ARE SPECIAL..AND THEY DO HAVE PROBLEMS. THEY DO NEED US AND WE MUST PROVIDE THE KINDS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES WHICH WILL HELP THEM FIND THEMSELVES FIRST...SECOND IN IMPORTANCE IS THE ABSORBING OF FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE. REAL LEARNING IS ONLY POSSIBLE IN A RELAXED, COMFORTABLE ATMOSHERE WHERE CREATIVE INTERACTION CAN OCCUR. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS, NECESSARY FOR THIS INTERACTION HAS BEEN STATED OVER AND OVER AGAIN. ACCORDING TO FROMM, WE CANNOT LOVE OTHERS UNLESS WE HAVE A HEALTHY LOVE OF OURSELVES; SULLIVAN SAYS THAT AS ONE JUDGES ONE'S SELF ONE

WILL JUDGE OTHERS; NIETZSCHE DISCUSSED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-BLAME AND THE BLAME OF OTHERS BY WARNING US THAT WE WOULD DO WELL TO FEAR ONE WHO HATES HIMSELF BECAUSE WE SHALL BECOME THE VICTIMS OF HIS REVENGE. JERSILD SAYS: "AS A CHILD APPROACHES MATURITY THERE IS AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE OF SELF AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS... AND THIS RELATIONSHIP IS ROOTED IN SOMETHING BEST EXPRESSED BY THE WORD "COMPASSION"... AND WE KNOW THAT COMPASSION IS AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY."

JERSILD'S DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPASSIONATE PERSONALITY IS EXTREMELY HELPFUL TO THOSE INVOLVED WITH THE DRAMATIC EXPERIENCE. HE POINTS OUT CLEARLY THAT ONE MUST BE able TO ENTER INTO A VAST RANGE OF EMOTIONS TO BE COMPASSIONATE. HE MUST DRAW UPON ALL OF HIS OWN RESOURCES AND DISCOVER THE FEELING OF FELLOWSHIP WITH ALL THAT IS GLORIOUS AND ~~SERVE~~ WORLD IN THE HUMAN SITUATION.. NOBLE THINGS, THE TRAGIC, WELLS OF SORROW, AND CURRENTS OF JOY. TO BE COMPASSIONATE WITH ONE WHO IS ANGRY, WE MUST DRAW UPON OUR OWN CAPACITY FOR ANGER AND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR OWN RAGE. TO TRULY EMPATHIZE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS HAPPY WE MUST DRAW UPON OUR OWN HAPPY EXPERIENCES...THE JOY OF BEING ACCEPTED, OR THE PLEASURE OF SOME ACHIEVEMENT. WE CANNOT APPRECIATE SOMEONE ELSE'S GLADNESS TO THE FULL UNLESS WE HAVE REALIZED SOME OF OUR OWN POTENTIALS FOR HAPPINESS.

IT IS UP TO US THEN, TO PROVIDE OUR TEENAGERS WITH THE KINDS OF IMPROVISATIONAL MATERIAL WHICH WILL HELP THEM, THROUGH VICARIOUS EXPERIENCING, TO DEEPEN THEIR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES AND SHARPEN THEIR SENSITIVITIES. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO PROMOTE INTELLECTUAL AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT; WE MUST ALSO FURTHER EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL

GROWTH. THOUGH MANY PEOPLE AGREE THAT MENTAL HEALTH DEPENDS, TO A LARGE DEGREE UPON EMOTIONAL HEALTH, MOST EDUCATORS SEEM TO DISREGARD THIS FACT COMPLETELY. TO QUOTE JERSILD AGAIN..."AT SCHOOL, A CHILD WITH A FRACTURED LIMB, IS FAR MORE SURE OF GETTING SYMPATHETIC HELP THAN A CHILD WITH FRACTURED FEELINGS....." BUT..HE CONTINUES, "IF CHILDREN ARE TO ACQUIRE EMOTIONAL HEALTH IT IS NECESSARY FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS TO ALLOW THEM TO SHOW AND EXAMINE THEIR EMOTIONS." MANY OF THEIR FEARS, HOSTILITIES AND RESENTMENTS CAN BE PARTIALLY RESOLVED THROUGH DISCUSSION OF HUMAN SITUATIONS INVOLVING THEM, BUT EVEN MORE EFFECTIVE IS THEIR DRAMATIZATION IN AN INTERPERSONAL SETTING. ONE CAN REALLY GET AT HIS EMOTIONS BY EXPERIENCING THEM, AS ONE'S SELF OR ANOTHER CHARACTER, IN A BELIEVABLE IMPROVISATION.

IF WE, AS CONSCIENTIOUS TEACHERS, DIRECTORS, RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEMS COMMON TO MOST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, WE MUST EARNESTLY SEEK FOR DRAMATIZATION MATERIAL WHICH CAN THROW HELPFUL LIGHT ON THEM. THE EXERCISES, NEED NOT MORALIZE, BUT CAN SUBTLY PRESENT NEW MEANS OF DEALING WITH THE CONFLICTS; THE YOUNGSTERS WILL BEGIN TO FEEL FREE TO EXPRESS THEIR NEGATIVE FEELINGS, AND MANY TIMES, AS THEIR UNDERSTANDING BROADENS, THEIR OWN PROBLEMS WILL BE RESOLVED.

IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL HERE TO GIVE YOU A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF THE WAY IN WHICH I APPROACHED A TEENAGE WORKSHOP IN VIRGINIA WHICH WAS THE BEGINNING OF A CREATIVE DRAMA PROJECT. IT HAPPENED TO WORK LIKE MAGIC. AFTER A FEW PLEASANTRIES, TO HELP US GET ACQUAINTED, I SAID:
"I BELIEVE IF EACH OF US HAD TIME TO SHARE HER AMBITION OR GOAL IN LIFE, AND WERE ASKED TO DESCRIBE IT IN ONE WORD, MOST OF US WOULD COME

UP WITH THE WORD HAPPINESS. SURELY WE ALL WANT A HAPPY LIFE MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE; WE MIGHT NOT AGREE ON THE ORDER FOR LISTING SUCH INTRINSIC PARTS AS HEALTH, FULFILLMENT, FRIENDS, ETC..ETC.. BUT SURELY WE ALL WANT HAPPINESS. HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE BEST PROCEDURES? HOW DO WE BECOME THOSE HAPPY, ALIVE, SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE? FIRST, WE CANNOT FIND HAPPINESS BY ABSORBING OURSELVES WITH THE PURSUIT OF IT. REUEL HOWE, A MAGNIFICENT PSYCHOLOGICAL WRITER SAYS, "PREOCCUPATION WITH ONE'S OWN MORAL STATE OR EMOTIONAL LIFE IS SELF-DESTROYING." IN OTHER WORDS IT IS FOLLY TO SIT IN ISOLATED LETHARGY AND EXPECT HAPPINESS TO SEEK US OUT, FOR IT IS NOT AN 'ALONE' AFFAIR; IT DEPENDS ENTIRELY UPON HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS. THE MORE WE CONCENTRATE ON OUR OWN DESIRES, SUCCESS, POPULARITY, DATES, ETC...THE LESS HAPPINESS WILL COME OUR WAY. AND YET, IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED THAT MOST OF US, UNCONSCIOUSLY, SPEND THREE-QUARTERS OF OUR TIME WITH <u>SELF</u> THOUGHTS..... CONCERNING SELF-PRIDE, SELF-HATE, OR SELF-PITY. WE'RE OVERLY BOASTFUL ABOUT OUR TALENTS, OR WE HATE OURSELVES FOR BEING TOO FAT, TOO THIN, TOO TALL, ETC.. OR WE ARE OVERWHELMED WITH PITY FOR OURSELVES. "POOR ME" WE MOAN, "NOBODY EVER HAD TO FACE SUCH INCREDIBLE PROBLEMS"..OR "NOBODY UNDERSTANDS HOW MUCH I NEED HELP; THEY ALL TURN THEIR BACKS." THIS CONCERN WITH SELF BUILDS GREAT WALLS AROUND US, WHICH SET US APART FROM OUR BROTHERS, AND MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM OR HEAR THEIR CRIES FOR OUR HELP AND UNDERSTANDING. IN THIS VOLUNTARY ISOLATION, WE LOSE ALL CHANCES FOR DEVELOPING THE WARM, CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS ON WHICH HAPPINESS DEPENDS. ONE OF MY FAVORITE PHILOSOPHERS WILFORD PETERSEN HAS WISE THOUGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT: "HAPPINESS," HE SAYS, "COMES UPON YOU UNAWARES WHILE YOU ARE HELPING

OTHERS...THIS IS POINTEDLY EXPRESSED IN THE OLD HINDU PROVERB WHICH READS: "HELP THY BROTHERS BOAT ACROSS AND LO! THINE OWN HAS REACHED THE SHORE." AND HE ADDS, "HAPPINESS GROWS OUT OF HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS BASED ON ATTITUDES OF GOOD WILL, TOLERANCE, UNDERSTANDING AND LOVE." SO..OUR FIRST TASK IS TO SEEK EXPERIENCES THAT WILL HELP US GET RID OF THESE DAMAGING SELF THOUGHTS..AND ESTABLISH THOSE WARM RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH WHICH WE ALL FREELY GIVE LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING, AND RECEIVE MEANWHILE, A BOUNTIFUL SUPPLY OF BOTH IN RETURN.

FROM THIS BEGINNING WITH THE GROUP, IT IS A SHORT STEP TO THE THEORY THAT GETTING INSIDE SOMEONE ELSE'S HEART AND MIND, AS ONE DOES IN BELIEVABLE IMPROVISATIONS, HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND HIS REACTIONS AND RESPONSES; IT ALSO GIVES US GOOD PRACTICE IN FORGETTING OUR BOTHERSOME SELF-THOUGHTS. THIS THEORY IS WELL BORNE-OUT BY BIBLICAL TEACHINGS..."..HE WHO FIND HIS LIFE, MUST LOSE IT..." AND "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."...THE LATTER STATEMENT IMPLIES THAT ONCE WE ACCEPT OURSELVES AS WE ARE, WE CAN FREE OURSELVES TO LOVE AND ACCEPT OUR NEIGHBOR. THE THIRD STEP CONCERNS THE REMINDER THAT SINCE WE HAVE ONLY OUR BODIES AND VOICES TO COMMUNICATE WHAT WE THINK AND FEEL, THESE SENDING INSTRUMENTS MUST BE KEPT ALIVE AND SENSITIVE. THROUGH CREATIVELY IMAGINING OURSELVES IN MANY OTHER PLACES AND HUMAN SITUATIONS, WE CAN LET OUR BODIES AND VOICES RESPOND FREELY TO THE NEW THOUGHT PATTERNS, THUS GROWING BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS IN AWARENESS AND FLEXIBILITY.

I WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE TODAY WITH SOME THOUGHTS, WHICH, WHEN YOU REALIZE THEIR SOURCE MUST SERVE AS THE LAST AND MOST CONVINCING TESTIMONY TO THE VALUES OF E.D. IN HIGH SCHOOL. ALTHOUGH IT COMES FROM MY OWN TEXTBOOK..CREATIVE PLAY ACTING..IT IS AN APPENDIX WRITTEN BY A COMMITTEE OF TEENAGERS...OR YOUNG ADULTS, WHO HAD BEEN A PART OF THE CREATIVE DRAMA CLASSES FOR MANY YEARS AND ASKED THE PUBLISHER IF THEY MIGHT MAKE THIS CONTRIBUTION. ON LOW DAYS, WHEN NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK, I RE-READ THESE PAGES; ALMOST ALWAYS THE SUNSHINES..LIGHT DAWNS...I FIND MY WAY...

"CTA HAS BEEN A CORNERSTONE IN THE GROWING AND LEARNING PROCESS--OF MY LIFE AND WORK. KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE VICARIOUSLY THROUGH THE MANY DRAMATIC PLAY EXERCISES WAS BOTH AN EDUCATIONAL AND A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE."

"FOR TEN YEARS THE HOURS . . . WERE THE MOST REWARDING ONES I HAVE EVER SPENT . . . (WHEN) I WENT AWAY TO COLLEGE . . . I REALIZED THE DEEP VALUES THAT HAD BEEN IMPLANTED FROM THOSE SIMPLE SITUATIONS WHICH WE ACTED OUT . . . ALL THESE INSTILLED IN US A COMPASSION FOR OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, A CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES, AND THE ABILITY TO MAKE A DECISION. WITH EACH NEW ROLE THAT I HAVE ASSUMED AS AN ADULT, FROM CAMP DIRECTOR, TO MY PRESENT ONE OF WIFE AND MOTHER, THESE VALUES HAVE REPEATEDLY PRESENTED THEMSELVES."

"AS A SHY, WITHDRAWN CHILD, I FOUND A PLACE WHERE I COULD EXPRESS MY EMOTIONS, WHERE I COULD BE MYSELF. MY EXPERIENCE HELPED ME TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS . . . . I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE FEELING OF GLADNESS ONE SENSES IN CONTRIBUTING ONE'S TIME AND ENERGY TO A 'CAUSE' ONE LOVES."

"IN CTA I HAVE COME TO KNOW THE GREAT PERSONAL SATISFACTION THAT CAN BE FOUND IN ACCOMPLISHMENT. I HAVE DISCOVERED WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PART OF SOMETHING THAT IS OF REAL IMPORTANCE. CTA HELPS ONE UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE LIFE AND OUR FELLOW-MAN. TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS, EVEN IN PART, IS TO HAVE COMPASSION. . . . I CAN NEVER AGAIN FIND WHAT I HAVE FOUND IN CTA BUT I WILL NEVER LOSE IT."

"BEING A CHARTER MEMBER OF CTA WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT POSSESSION OF MY YOUTH. WHATEVER SENSE OF BEAUTY AND OF SYMPATHY FOR OTHERS I MAY HAVE DEVELOPED OVER THE YEARS I DISCOVERED FIRST WITH THE HELP OF ISABEL BURGER AND THE EXTRAORDINARY STUDENTS SHE ATTRACTED TO HER CLASSES. . . MOST IMPORTANT, THE PREDOMINATELY EMOTIONAL CLIMATE IN CLASS AND ON STAGE PROBABLY OFFERED US THE BEST CHANCE, AT THE MOST FORMATIVE TIME OF OUR LIVES, TO HELP EACH OTHER LEARN AND GROW . . . . IT OFTEN TOOK TIME TO FIND OUT WHAT WE HAD ACQUIRED. THE REALIZATION MAY ONLY HAVE COME TO SOME OF US WHEN WE WALKED IN THE MIDST OF HOPELESSLY ENSLAVED PEOPLES IN EAST BERLIN, OR AS WE TOOK TIME OUT TO CHEER UP A HOSPITALIZED FRIEND AT CHRISTMASTIDE, OR, FOR ALL OF US, AS WE READ PETER PAN TO A LITTLE CHILD FOR THE FIRST TIME."

"BY EXPERIENCING, IN CTA WORKSHOP, MANY DRAMATIC SITUATIONS WITH WHICH I MAY BE FACED IN LATER LIFE, I HAVE ACQUIRED MANY QUALITIES WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO A SUCCESSFUL ADULT LIFE. PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE IS A HIGHLY DEVELOPED AWARENESS. SUCCESS IN LIFE SURELY DEPENDS UPON THE DEGREE TO WHICH ONE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS IN A MYRIAD OF REAL-LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES. AWARENESS IS ESSENTIAL TO SENSITIVITY; IT HELPS ONE RECOGNIZE OTHER PEOPLE'S NEEDS AND ALSO EXCUSE THEIR

INDIVIDUAL ECCENTRICITIES. I HAVE ALSO, THROUGH MY CTA EXPERIENCES, DEVELOPED A STRIVING FOR PERFECTION. NOTHING IS WORTH DOING UNLESS IT IS DONE AS PERFECTLY AS WE CAN DO IT! THE ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE AND EXPRESS EMOTION FREELY BUT WITH CONTROL AND DIRECTION HAS GREATLY INCREASED FOR ME. I ATTRIBUTE THIS ENTIRELY TO THE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHUT OUT PRESENT ENVIRONMENT, AND EXTRANEOUS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, IN ORDER TO BECOME ANOTHER PERSON IN A DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT. BECAUSE ALL OF THESE ATTRIBUTES ARE SO ESSENTIAL TO A HAPPY, CONTRIBUTIVE ADULTHOOD, I FEEL THAT CREATIVE PLAY ACTING, ACCORDING TO OUR CTA METHODS, IS AN IMPORTANT SUPPLEMENT TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL FORCES OF HOME AND SCHOOL."

"ONE WHO HAS PARTICIPATED FOR A DOZEN YEARS IN SUCH A CREATIVE DRAMA PROJECT AS CTA IN BALTIMORE, HONESTLY FEELS, AS HE LOOKS BACK FROM HIS 'COLLEGE OUTPOST' THAT WHATEVER HE IS CAN BE LARGELY ATTRIBUTED TO THIS CREATIVE GROUP EXPERIENCE. SUCH A PROJECT IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A SUCCESSION OF CLASSES. IT REPRESENTS A PLACE WHERE ONE CAN BE HIMSELF WITHOUT FEAR OR PRETENSE--A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE IS NOURISHED BY A WARM SENSE OF BELONGING, SHARING, BELIEVING.

"THE TWO WORDS THAT SEEM TO STATE THE CORE OF THE 'CREATIVE DRAMA' EXPERIENCE ARE AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT. ONE FIRST BECOMES AWARE OF ONE'S SELF, AND THEN IN QUICK SUCCESSION, GAINS A DEEPER AWARENESS OF OTHERS. TO BE AWARE IS TO UNDERSTAND, TO EXPERIENCE, TO FEEL, TO LIVE. THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING ONE'S SELF IS SOMETIMES A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE, SOMETIMES EMBARRASSING, BUT ALWAYS IT IS REVEALING.

COMMITMENT MEANS THE TOTAL GIVING OF ONE'S SELF, THE DEDICATION OF ALL ONE HAS, TO A WORTHY HUMANITARIAN CAUSE. THIS LESSON, ONCE LEARNED, CARRIES OVER INTO ALL ASPECTS OF ONE'S DAILY LIFE AND, WHEN PRACTICED, RETURNS THE GREATEST BENEFITS AND REWARDS. TO BE COMMITTED IS TO CARE--AND CARING IS WHAT MAKES LIFE WORTHWHILE."

ALL THE STATEMENTS FOCUS ON FOUR OR FIVE BASIC PHILOSOPHIES AND NEEDS THAT WE ALL BELIEVE: 1) HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION, 2) ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S SELF, 3) THE BUILDING OF SECURITY AND SELF CONFIDENCE THROUGH A SENSE OF SATISFACTION IN ACCOMPLISHMENT 4) THE JOY OF SERVICE AND SHARING IN A WORTHWHILE TASK.

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(STORY FOR DEMONSTRATION.....GOING HOME.....)

THIS IS BASED ON A REAL STORY WHICH APPEARED IN READERS DIGEST SOME TIME AGO AND PROVIDED THE THEME FOR "TIE A YELLOW RIBBON ON THE OLD OAK TREE" A POPULAR SONG. IT CONCERNS A RELEASED PRISONER, WHO HAS HEARD NOTHING FROM HIS WIFE DURING THE INCARCERATION AND NOW..EVEN THOUGH HE HAS WRITTEN AGAIN THAT HE HAS BEEN PAROLED EARLY, SHE IS SILENT. HE CANNOT RESIST TAKING THE BUS TOWARD HOME ANYWAY...AT THE LAST MOMENT HE WROTE AGAIN TELLING HIS WIFE THAT IF SHE WANTS HIM HOME AGAIN..PLEASE TO GIVE HIM A SIGNAL..TIE A YELLOW RIBBON ON THE BIG TREE BY THE BUS STATION. THERE WAS HIGH DRAMA IN THE LAST MOMENT BEFORE THE BUS PULLED INTO THE LITTLE TOWN. AS IT SLOWED DOWN, HE DARED TO LOOK;.HIS HEART SKIPPED A BEAT!..THE OLD TREE WAS COVERED WITH STREAMING RIBBONS!. HIS WIFE AND TWO BOYS STOOD BENEATH IT WAITING ANXIOUSLY!...

(THIS IS THE WAY OUR STORY WILL GO)

OUR RELEASED PRISONER IS A WOMAN, WHO HAS TRIED DESPERATELY WHEN HER HUSBAND WAS OUT OF WORK TO DO SOME PART-TIME SELLING..TO HELP THEM BUY FOOD..SHE DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THOSE MEN WHO OFFERED HER THE JOB AND ONLY WHEN SHE WAS ARRESTED ALONG WITH THEM FOR SELLING STOLEN GOODS..DID SHE REALIZE THAT THEY WERE SHREWD, SHADY CHARACTERS. THE JUDGE WOULD NOT LISTEN TO HER PLEA..AND SHE WENT TO JAIL FOR THREE YEARS. HER HUSBAND HAD NOT COME TO SEE HER OR WRITTEN..SO NOW THAT SHE

IS PAROLED EARLY SHE DESPERATELY WANTS TO GO HOME BUT IS AFRAID SHE IS NOT WANTED. WE WILL LAY THE SCENE ON THE BUS..THE OTHER INHABITANTS ARE SOME COLLEGE GIRLS OFF TO FLORIDA FOR A SPRING VACATION,AND THEY HAVE ONLY LATELY,.AS THE BUS IS NEARING THE FLORIDA LINE,...NOTICED THIS LONELY WOMAN,.SLUMPED IN THE FRONT SEAT,.LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW.. THEY GOT BACK ON AFTER A FOOD STOP..AND SHE IS STILL THERE..IN FACT HAS NOT EATEN OR SLEPT...AT ALL...THE FOUR GIRLS,.AS THEY SIT DOWN MUNCHING ON POPCORN...AND DRINKING COKE..NOTICE HER AGAIN..AND WONDER IF SHE ISN'T STARVED....THEY DECIDE TO SPEAK TO HER, OFFER HER SOME FOOD..ASK WHAT'S WRONG AND IF THEY CAN HELP..SHE TRIES TO AVOID REPLYING..AND REFUSES FOOD..BUT THEY PRESS ON..WITH SOMETHING LIKE "IF THERE'S SOME WAY WE COULD HELP, WE'D SO LIKE TO. IT SEEMS A SHAME FOR US TO BE OFF ON A HOLIDAY AND SO HAPPY..AND HAVE YOU SITTING HERE SO MISERABLE. AFTER MUCH PERSUASION..SHE TELLS THEM HER STORY, ABOUT PRISON, HER HUSBAND'S SILENCE..THE PLAN ABOUT THE RIBBONS ON THE OLD TREE. ONE GIRL SEES A STATION AS THEY PASS AND READS THE SIGN THAT HER LITTLE TOWN LIES ONLY A FEW MILES AHEAD...SHE HIDES HER FACE IN HER HANDS. THEY TRY TO COMFORT HER ASSURING HER THAT THE RIBBON WILL BE THERE. AS THE BUS SLOWS DOWN THE GIRL NEAR WINDOW SHOUTS.. WE'RE HERE..THERE'S THE TREE..AND LOOK FRIEND...LOOK QUICKLY. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF RIBBONS AND THE HUSBAND AND 2 LITTLE BOYS ARE UNDER IT.

CREATIVE DRAMA FOR THE SENIOR CITIZEN
FOR THE ATA CONVENTION L.A. AUGUST 1976
ISABEL B. BURGER

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THERE HAS BEEN A WIDESPREAD CONCERN FOR THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, THE LIVING CONDITIONS, AND THE ECONOMIC STATE OF THE SENIOR CITIZEN. THERE IS HARDLY A COLLEGE OR JUNIOR COLLEGE IN OUR VICINITY WHICH IS NOT OFFERING FREE PROGRAMS, LECTURES, CONCERTS, CRAFT COURSES, AND OTHER FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT. HALF-FARE ON BUSES, SPECIAL RATES AT MOVIES AND PLAYS, AND INEXPENSIVE HOUSING ARE PROVIDED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. ALL OF THIS POINTS TO THE FACT THAT THERE ARE VERY SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, WHICH BECOME MORE DIFFICULT TO SOLVE EACH DAY, DUE TO THE LIFE-PROLONGING DRUGS, THE ECONOMIC CONDITION, AND MORE THAN ALL ELSE, THE SHARP DIFFERENCE IN THE ATTITUDE OF YOUNG TOWARD OLD. "DONT'S LISTEN TO THE OVER 30S" HAS BECOME A BY-WORD. THIS IS IN DIRECT CONTRAST TO THE PHILOSOPHIES PREVALENT IN PAST CIVILIZATIONS WHEN THE GRANDFATHER OF THE TRIBE WAS THE WISE ADVISER, PRIEST, COUNSELLOR, AND RESPECTED BY ALL. IT WAS HE WHO REMAINED THE STOREHOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE HANDING DOWN TRADITIONS AND MORAL CUSTOMS BY WORD OF MOUTH. HIS ADVICE WAS SOUGHT AFTER, EVEN BY THE VERY YOUNG. IN THE TRIBAL FAMILY, HE FELT WANTED, NEEDED, AND A STRONG SENSE OF INNER SECURITY AND SELF-WORTH. TODAY, THE EXACT OPPOSITE IS TRUE. THE RESULTS ARE OBVIOUS: 1) A LOST FEELING, 2) A SENSE OF ISOLATION AND ALONENESS, 3) AN INSECURITY AND FEELING OF WORTHLESSNESS, 4) A LETHARGY AND HOSTILITY MOTIVATED BY SELF-PITY AND SELF-HATE, 5) A SENSE OF BEING FINISHED, READY TO DIE.

AND YET GOETHE SAYS: "TO GROW OLD MEANS TO BEGIN A NEW OCCUPATION." GEORGE SAND SAID: "OLD AGE CAN BE TIME FOR RIPENING RATHER THAN DECAY." SCIENTISTS HAVE ISSUED SOME INTERESTING AND OPTIMISTIC STATEMENTS DERIVED FROM PROVEN FACTS. THEY SAY THAT CREATIVITY LASTS FOREVER AND WE ALL HAVE UNFULFILLED POTENTIALS TO CREATE AND IMAGINE. ACCORDING TO RECENT EXPERIMENTS WITH ANIMALS, THEY HAVE PROVEN THAT IF THE BRAIN HAS THE USE AND EXERCISE IT NEEDS, IT CAN KEEP FUNCTIONING AS WELL, IF NOT BETTER, THAN IT DID AT FORTY. IT IS DISUSE AND INACTIVITY, AS IS THE CASE WITH MUSCLES, WHICH CAUSES ATROPHY AND DETERIORATION OF BRAIN POWER. SO, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THOSE OF US INTERESTED IN HELPING THE SENIORS CONTINUE TO GROW AND "RIPEN" MUST FIND WAYS 1) TO HELP THEM TO FEEL WANTED, AND NEEDED 2) TO BUILD A SENSE OF SECURITY BY DEVELOPING A HEALTHY SELF-IMAGE, 3) TO FOSTER CREATIVE GROWTH, THROUGH KEEPING SENSES ALIVE AND RESPONSIVE, 4) TO PROVIDE EXPERIENCES WHICH WILL ELIMINATE THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS OF SELF-PITY AND SELF-HATE.

I CONTEND THAT WE HAVE A STRONG CASE FOR THE CREATIVE DRAMA EXPERIENCE AS A VALID MEANS TO THIS END. I'D LIKE TO CONCENTRATE ON THIS ACTIVITY TODAY. PRODUCING THE PLAY MAY OFFER AN OUTLET AND GROWTH EXPERIENCE FOR SOME, BUT IN MY EXPERIENCE A SKILLFULLY HANDLED CREATIVE DRAMA PROJECT CAN BENEFIT ALL. AND I'D LIKE TO GIVE YOU MY REASONS FOR HAVING SUCH FAITH IN THE MEDIUM. FIRST, HAVING WORKED IN THE FIELD SINCE THE LATE THIRTIES AND HAVING GIVEN ALL KINDS OF TEACHERS' TRAINING COURSES, IN WHICH SOME "SENIORS" HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SEE, AT FIRST HAND, THESE BENEFITS BEGINNING TO SUBTLY INFLUENCE AND CHANGE PEOPLE.

ONE OF THE SPECIAL OCCASIONS WHICH STANDS OUT IN MY MEMORY, WAS A TWO-WEEKS WORKSHOP AT ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE IN WEST HARTFORD, WHERE MY STUDENTS WERE THIRTY-SIX TEACHING NUNS FROM ALL OVER THE EAST. AT LEAST A THIRD OF THEM WERE OVER FIFTY, SOME WELL-OVER! MANY WERE RESERVED, PAINFULLY WITHDRAWN, AND APPARENTLY INFLEXIBLE. I SAW, AT ONCE, THAT LECTURES WOULD DO LITTLE GOOD; I SIMPLY HAD TO GET THEM TO THE POINT OF PARTICIPATING, SOMEHOW. BY THE FIFTH DAY, IT WORKED WITH A FEW AND THEN, I COULD HARDLY STOP THE CLASSES! THEY WERE ALL EAGER, EXCITED, AND MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THEM INSIDE THAN THEY WERE ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING METHODS. TEARS WERE SHED AS WE PARTED, AND ONE DARLING LITTLE NUN (AT LEAST SIXTY OR MORE) SAID: "I'M SO GRATEFUL. I'M GOING TO BE A REALLY GOOD TEACHER FROM NOW ON. WHAT A SHAME I HAD TO WAIT SO LONG FOR THIS." I'VE HAD SIMILAR OVER AND OVER AGAIN, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD. I AM ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT IF WE COULD FIND THE RIGHT GROUP OF INSTRUCTORS (AND THEY MUST BE SELECTED VERY CAREFULLY) AND THE RIGHT TRAINING AND PREPARATION FOR THEM, WE COULD BRING NEW HEALTH AND LIFE TO THOUSANDS OF OLDER MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE SETTLED BACK, GIVEN UP AND ARE RESIGNED TO SUFFERING THROUGH THE LAST DECADE OR SO OF LIFE.

AND NOW, I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU OF AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE I HAD LAST YEAR, WHICH ADDED TO MY CONVICTIONS ON THIS SUBJECT. LOYOLA COLLEGE, IN BALTIMORE, UNDER SISTER CLEOPHAS'S DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, DECIDED TO DO A SPECIAL SERIES OF FREE MONDAY AFTERNOON PROGRAMS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE SCHOOL CAMPUS. SHE CALLED ME IN FOR THE PLANNING SESSION AND AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION OF IDEAS FOR THOSE MONDAYS, I ASKED WHETHER WE COULD NOT CALL THE PROGRAM CREATIVE LIVING. IT SEEMED MUCH MORE ALIVE AND VITAL THAN A SERIES OF LECTURES ON ART OR MUSIC OR TRAVEL. SHE WAS DELIGHTED, AND ASKED ME TO GIVE THE

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE. I WAS PROMISED ABOUT THIRTY TO FORTY MEN AND WOMEN. I CAREFULLY PREPARED AN INFORMAL TALK, TO ANALYZE OUR PROBLEMS AND TO DECIDE WHAT WE MIGHT DO TO ATTACK THEM. THEN I PLANNED TO PRESENT THE IDEA OF SOME CREATIVE DRAMA WORK, AS ONE METHOD, FUN AND EFFECTIVE. (WE EVEN WORKED OUT SOME EXERCISES WHICH THIS SMALL GROUP COULD DO, IN THE SPACE AVAILABLE.) IMAGINE MY DISTRESS WHEN I WALKED INTO A PACKED LECTURE HALL OF 160 MEN AND WOMEN, BETWEEN 55 AND 85; SOME WERE EVEN IN WHEELCHAIRS! I CONTINUED, EXACTLY AS I HAD PLANNED, HOWEVER THE INTEREST AND THE RESPONSE WAS HIGH FOR THE WHOLE HOUR! THEN I DARED THE IMPOSSIBLE! I SAID, "NOW...SINCE WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO FORGET OURSELVES COMPLETELY, WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY SOME DRAMATIC SITUATIONS WE CAN DO, JUST SITTING HERE, AS WE ARE?" THERE WAS AN ENTHUSIASTIC, AUDIBLE REPLY, WITH MUCH NODDING OF HEADS, SO I WENT ON. "FIST I WANT YOU TO KNOW THE TWO KEYS TO THE SECRET OF MAKE-BELIEVE, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE'LL BE DOING, PRETENDING! I WANT YOU TO PICTURE IN YOUR MIND WHERE YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU'RE HANDLING. WE'RE NOT IN THIS ROOM; WE'RE OUT ON A LOVELY BEACH, ON A SUNNY DAY, RELAXED, AND LOVING EVERY MOMENT! PICTURE IT IN YOUR MINDS! THE SECOND KEY, IS TO THINK THE THOUGHTS YOU WOULD BE THINKING AS THIS OTHER PERSON, ON A DELIGHTFUL TRIP TO THE SHORE, EAGERLY LAPPING UP SUNSHINE. DON'T LET A SINGLE THOUGHT OF YOUR OWN COME INTO YOUR MIND. YOU MIGHT BE THINKING, 'OH WHAT A BEAUTIFUL DAY. AND THAT SEA AND THE SKY. I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS BLUER, I FEEL SO AT PEACE, SO GOOD INSIDE.' YOUR GOOD FRIEND, WHO HAS DRIVEN YOU DOWN, IS BESIDE YOU, ENJOYING IT ALL AS MUCH AS YOU ARE. YOU'RE BOTH SO HAPPY YOU HAVEN'T EVEN NOTICED A BUNCH OF TEENAGERS PLAYING WITH A BEACH BALL, HIGHER ON THE BEACH! SUDDENLY, YOUR REVERIE IS BROKEN BY THE SHOUT FROM YOUR FRIEND 'LOOK OUT. LOOK

OUT FOR THE BALL!' YOU RESPOND JUST IN TIME TO DUCK, AND PROTECT YOURSELF FROM AN ENORMOUS BEACH BALL THAT IS AIMED, BY MISTAKE, RIGHT AT YOUR HEAD!" AND THEN I PAUSED, "ALL RIGHT, NOW, SHUT YOUR EYES FOR A MOMENT UNTIL YOU CAN HEAR THOSE WAVES AND SEE THE BLUE SKY AND THE WATER! AH! ISN'T THAT LOVELY? FEEL THE SUNSHINE!!" (AS I SAW THEM RELAXING, SMILING, LOOKING THROUGH HALF-CLOSED EYES I SHOUTED THE CUE.) "LOOK OUT, DUCK, QUICKLY! THE BALL! LOOK OUT!" THE RESPONSE WAS ABSOLUTELY REMARKABLE. SOME DUCKED THEIR HEADS, LEANED ON A COMPANION'S SHOULDER, GRASPED A NEIGHBOR FOR COMFORT, CRADLED THEIR HEADS IN THEIR ARMS! SEVERAL EVEN DROPPED TO THE FLOOR, LEANING THEIR HEADS ON THE CHAIRS! AND SUDDENLY, FROM THE BACK OF THE ROOM, RAN A DEAR OLD MAN, GRINNING DEVILISHLY, AND BOUNCING THE IMAGINARY BEACH BALL GLEEFULLY, WATCHING THE HAVOC HE HAD CAUSED. FINALLY, HE TOOK THE BALL BACK TO HIS FRIENDS.

I SIMPLY COULD NOT RESTRAIN MYSELF! I CALLED "CURTAIN" (A WORD I USE TO END AN IMPROVISATION). THEY CAME BACK TO THE PRESENT WORLD WITH LAUGHTER AND TALK, JOYOUSLY RELATING TO THEIR NEIGHBORS! THEN, FINALLY, THE WHOLE ROOM BURST INTO APPLAUSE, IN WHICH I JOINED, APPLAUDING FOR THEM!! THE SENSE OF THERAPY, RELEASE, AND SECURITY WAS BEAUTIFUL TO BEHOLD! THEY ASKED FOR MORE, SO DESPITE THE SHORT TIME LEFT WE DID ANOTHER EXERCISE AND IT WORKED JUST AS WELL. DURING THE REFRESHMENTS, AT LEAST TWO DOZEN PEOPLE CAME UP TO ME TO ASK THAT THEY HAVE SOME MORE MEETINGS LIKE THIS WHEN THEY COULD SPEND THE WHOLE TIME DOING DRAMATIC SCENES. THIS WAS THE ONLY PROOF WE NEEDED. IT <u>WOULD</u> WORK, IT WAS BOUND TO WORK! WE TRIED TO START A REGULAR COURSE IN THE FALL, BUT WE MADE A SERIOUS MISTAKE! INSTEAD OF FUNDING SUCH A PROGRAM, WE LISTED IT IN THE CATALOGUE WITH TUITION REQUIRED. SUCH A SMALL NUMBER REGISTERED, THAT I INSISTED UPON

CANCELLING THE COURSE. WE MUST NOW GO FORWARD IN A DIFFERENT WAY. WE WELL TRY TO GET A GRANT FOR THIS PROJECT; I FEEL SURE THAT IT WILL SUCCEED. (SEE FOOTNOTE AT END OF PAPER.)

FOR THE SAKE OF THE ARGUMENT, THE DISCUSSION OF PATTERNS FOR THE SENIOR CITIZEN'S SATISFACTORY LIFE STYLE, I MUST ADMIT THAT TO THESE 160, I DID POINT OUT FOUR STEPS THEY MUST TAKE IF THEY WISHED THEIR POWERS OF CREATING AND IMAGINING, THEIR GIFTS FROM THEIR CREATOR, TO GROW AND PRODUCE, SO THAT THEY COULD MOVE FORWARD TOWARD PERSONAL FULFILLMENT AND ENRICHMENT OF THEIR DAILY LIVES.

FIRST WE MUST LEARN TO ACCEPT AND RESPECT OUR INNER SELVES, "LOVE" WHAT WE ARE AND ARE GOING TO BECOME. TO DO THIS WE MUST CAST OFF THE CHAINS OF SELF-PRIDE, SELF-PITY AND SELF-HATE. THE FEARS, SUSPICIONS AND NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WHICH BUILD WALLS WHICH ISOLATE US FROM THE LIFE-STREAM OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS. THE CHANGE WILL COME ONLY AS WE ARE ABLE TO BREAK AWAY FROM OUR OWN SELF-CENTEREDNESS AND TURN OUR ATTENTION AND INTEREST TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE ABOUT US. (THIS MAY SEEM CONTRADICTORY FOR I AM RECOMMENDING LOVING AND ACCEPTING YOURSELF AND ASKING IN THE SAME BREATH THAT WE TURN AWAY FROM SELF CENTEREDNESS. THESE IDEAS ARE OPPOSITES AND MUST NOT BE CONFUSED.) LOVE OF SELF MEANS HAVING A HEALTHY SENSE OF ONE'S OWN WORTH AS A PERSON, AS A CHILD OF GOD. FROM THIS BASE WE CAN REACH OUT HELPFULLY TO OTHERS. (SELF-ESTEEM CAN ONLY BE MAINTAINED WHEN ONE HAS THE FEELING THAT WHAT HE IS DOING IS USEFUL AND NECESSARY!) ONLY AS WE ARE ABLE TO ACCEPT AND LOVE OUR SELVES CAN WE ACCEPT AND LOVE OUR FELLOW-MAN, OPEN OUR HEARTS AND INVEST IN LIVING WITH OTHERS.

SECOND WE MUST LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP POSITIVE VALUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SATISFYING CREATIVE GROWTH. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF SUCH OPPORTUNITIES AROUND US, IF WE ARE WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK OF LIVING WITH AND FOR OTHERS, AND STOP BEING LIMITED BY SELF-CONSUMING THOUGHTS. THE REBIRTH OF CREATIVITY COMES FROM PERSONAL NOT TECHNICAL INFLUENCES. AS WE LOOK FOR THE LOCKED UP CREATIVITY IN OTHERS, IN ORDER TO HELP RELEASE IT, WE WILL REFRESH AND REFURBISH OUR OWN INNER RADIANCE. WHAT WE ARE ABLE TO GIVE IN COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING, AS WE DEEPEN OUR AFFIRMATION OF OTHERS, WE RECEIVE AGAIN TENFOLD. SCHWEITZER ONCE SAID, AND I COULDN'T AGREE MORE: "ONLY WHAT YOU GIVE, WILL YOU HAVE."

THIRD WE MUST BE COMMITTED, IF WE ARE TO LIVE CREATIVELY, WE MUST CARE. AN UNCOMMITTED, INDIFFERENT LIFE IS A DULL CHAOTIC LIFE. WE MUST BE COMMITTED TO SOME WORTHWHILE CAUSE OR ENDEAVOR. WE GAIN STRENGTH FOR OUR OWN STRUGGLES WHEN WE HELP OTHERS WITH THEIRS!

FOURTH WE MUST BELIEVE IN SOMETHING VALID, EXAMINE OUR OWN STANDARDS. SHARPEN OUR INTEGRITY AND BUILD A FAITH THAT IS POSITIVE AND SOUND. HERE ARE SEVERAL HINTS:

1. BITTERNESS, CYNICISM AND INDIFFERENCE ARE DESTRUCTIVE AND BUILD HIGHER THE WALLS OF ISOLATION.
2. ACCEPTING LIFE, NOT TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM IT, BUILDS COURAGE TO FACE UP TO DIFFICULTIES.
3. ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITIES. MAKE DECISIONS, DON'T SHIFT BLAME OR RESPONSIBILITY.

4. DON'T ALWAYS TRY TO SAVE YOURSELF! IN SO PROTECTING LIFE, WE MAY SOMETIMES SMOTHER IT. REMEMBER THE BIBLICAL WARNING: "WHOSOEVER WILL SAVE HIS LIFE...SHALL LOSE IT!"
5. THE FOURTH SUGGESTION COMES FROM JESUS OF NAZARETH. "A NEW COMMAND I GIVE UNTO YOU, THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER." THIS COMMAND, GIVEN IN THE FIRST CENTURY IS JUST AS PRACTICAL TODAY! TWENTIETH CENTURY PSYCHIATRISTS ADMIT THAT IT IS THE MOST PROFOUND INSIGHT INTO MAN'S NATURE THAT HAS YET BEEN STATED. MAN IS IN SOUND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH TO THE DEGREE THAT HE RELATES AFFIRMATIVELY TO HIS FELLOW-MAN. LOVE HEALS PEOPLE; IT CAN TRULY MEND A HUMAN RELATIONSHIP. HATRED DESTROYS, AND ISOLATES INDIVIDUALS.

THOSE ARE SOME OF THE ARGUMENTS I PROPOSED TO MY 160 SENIOR CITIZENS, IN MY TALK PRECEDING THE EXERCISES, ONE OF WHICH I HAVE DESCRIBED TO YOU, WITH ITS MAGNIFICENT RESULTS. I MUST BELIEVE THAT SOME OF THIS PHILOSOPHIZING STRUCK HOME, AN EMPATHETIC CHORD, AND HELPED RELEASE THESE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE GLADLY, ENTHUSIASTICALLY IN WHAT FOLLOWED. AS I SPOKE WITH THEM, I COULD FEEL A CHANGE, THE RELEASE, AND RELAXATION, THE FRESH, SPONTANEOUS REACTIONS. THEY WERE, IN THE TERMS OF MODERN YOUNG PEOPLE, EXPERIENCING A "HIGH" AND THEY WANTED SOMEHOW TO FEEL IT AGAIN. THAT'S WHY I KNEW DEEP DOWN INSIDE, THAT WE MUST FIND A WAY TO INCLUDE THIS KIND OF PROGRAM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND ABOVE ALL TRAINING FOR A CAREFULLY SCREENED GROUP OF LEADERS WHO ARE TEMPERAMENTALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY EQUIPPED TO RESPOND TO SUCH A CHALLENGE. I AM CONVINCED OF THE POWER OF THIS KIND OF EXERCISE, TO ACHIEVE WHAT ARISTOTLE CALLS A "CATHARSIS", TO GET RID OF SELF-PITY AND SELF-HATE.

WHEN WE PUT OURSELVES IN ANOTHER PERSON'S SHOES, OR, AS THE LATE WINFRED WARD USED SAY "TRY ON SOME OTHER PERSONALITY", WE ARE ON THE WAY TO FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE CHAINS OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS, DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION FOR OUR FELLOW-MAN, AND BROADENING OUR OWN SENSE OF SELF-WORTH. AND LET'S FACE THIS FACT: OUR OVER 60'S REPRESENT A SOURCE OF TREMENDOUS WEALTH TO THIS NATION; HERE LIES UNUSED CREATIVITY, WISDOM, MANPOWER, WHICH MUST BE SAVED FOR THE INDIVIDUAL'S SAKE AND FOR THE NATION'S. REUEL HOWE, ONE OF MY FAVORITE PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS WRITES IN HIS BOOK "HOW TO STAY YOUNGER WHILE GROWING OLDER," "NO MATTER HOW CREATIVE A SINGLE ELDERLY PERSON MAY BE, HE CANNOT HELP BEING AFFECTED BY THE NEGATIVE CONDITIONS THAT BESET THE OLDER CITIZEN. A JOINT EFFORT BY INDIVIDUALS, GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL IS NEEDED TO CORRECT AN IMPOVERISHING CONDITION FOR US ALL. BY THE YEAR 2000, HALF THE POPULATION WILL BE OVER 50, AND ONE-THIRD OVER 65. FAILURE TO USE THE EXPERIENCE, INTELLIGENCE AND WISDOM OF SO MANY OLDER PEOPLE CAN BECOME A TRAGEDY FOR BOTH THE AGED AND FOR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE."

IF WE DRAMA INSTRUCTORS ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN FINDING WAYS TO PUT OUR ART TO THE SERIOUS SERVICE OF SOCIETY AND THE WORLD, IT SEEMS TO ME WE MUST FIND WAYS OF USING THE REMARKABLE POWERS OF CREATIVE DRAMA, FOR THIS GROWING AND TROUBLED GROUP, THE SENIOR CITIZENS.

Footnote reference from Page Six

Since this paper was given at the 1976 convention of the ATA in Los Angeles, a pilot project, lead by Mrs. Burger, and sponsored by the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore, Md., has been funded by the Maryland Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy. A group of thirty-five men and women have been eager participants in ten sessions of creative drama. The program (Feb. 2 - April 6, 1976) is titled, "Dynamic Living in Retirement".

7